

**Linda Clair**  
**Meditation Retreat**  
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**Transcription from Audio Recordings**

**File 4B – Tuesday morning discussion session**

Question: Something that's been happening a while – I have a tendency I've noticed – as I go stiller and deeper I have this sense my body is falling forward.

Linda: Is it really falling forward? Or is it not?

Question: I'm not really sure. I feel I am. Is it fear telling me that?

Linda: I think it's more that you're so used to using your mind as a reference point that when it starts to break down, you don't know where you are.

Maybe concentrate on being really grounded. I know you are but be a bit more grounded in your body. If you feel that starts to happen, come back to your breath. Don't be scared of losing stillness or anything. Come back to a sensation in your body.

Question: I'm probably scared of losing it.

Linda: Yes, you can get a bit attached to the stillness and then get a little bit spacey.

Question: I don't feel spacey. I feel my body is going forward.

Linda: I wouldn't worry too much about it. You haven't fallen down or anything. Maybe it is a little bit but I wouldn't be too concerned about it but make sure you stay grounded. And watch that fear of losing that stillness because then that can create this attachment to it where you start to repress anything else coming up and you focus on it. But you look really good.

Question: Yesterday, it was quite different. But at the end of it I saw a lot about myself so in the end I suppose it was beneficial but it wasn't easy.

Linda: Well, you need to see stuff about yourself and some of it are things that are usually habits that you don't particularly want to acknowledge but they are there. Everyone's got that in them. It's not that you hate yourself or anything like that. It's just that you go, "I'm not going to put up with this anymore."

Question: That's the way I felt when I put my head down on my pillow yesterday. It was during the two-day sessions. I was very tired but I thought, "Oh god, I don't want this anymore. That's enough!"

Linda: You have to keep doing that, saying, "I don't want this anymore," without going, "I detest myself!" – it's not about that, it's not that at all.

It's just, "I want to be real. I want to be able to be real. I want to be able to be authentic and not behave from this place or fear," essentially that's what it is – a place of fear. It doesn't mean you

become this so-called perfect person or anything like that. You just become authentic and that's different for each person.

Question: For two days I've been gathering courage to ask a question. First, I think I got yesterday a good understanding of you saying if you don't try hard, then you'll notice an absence. This is my fourth retreat and I've been struggling with this orientation in time and I've been trying hard not to be attached to time – for example, I left my watch in the cabin – but I still struggle... So this time I thought, "I will just let it go." And now, it doesn't seem to be an issue. (Laughing) I only noticed yesterday, "It's gone. Where has it gone because I haven't been trying hard?" I think that because of that, I'm not stuck on having to be oriented in time and it helps me sit more on the floor than on a chair. So I think that was my example of success. (Linda comments further below on this question of not trying hard and letting go versus making effort.)

But I have a question in the context of yesterday when you mentioned that a lot of what we struggle with is the fear of death. I thought yes, that's probably fair. But let's imagine that we overcome fear of death which is a complex issue, it doesn't help us with the day-to-day fear of failure at work, failure with your boss or a colleague who bullies you. If I understand death, does it mean that I will not care about those daily fears?

Linda: What I'm saying is that all those fears come from the fear of death. It's not like being aware of it where you do something and you go, "Oh, that fear is the fear of death." I'm not saying to do that. But eventually that's what you see. You do see all your fear does stem from this fear of death. So once you face your mortality and face that fear, which is what you're doing everyday doing this – facing your fear – the other fears dissolve. They just magically dissolve.

You start to see there isn't failure – it's only your fear of failure – failure does not exist anymore. All these things that you thought were real are suddenly not real. You see that they're all in your head. This thing about failure, success, appearance, everything just goes by the wayside.

So no, there isn't fear of anything; almost anything, I'd say. So yes, all those fears dissolve when you get down to the source of your fear which is really the fear of your own death. And it's fear of *your* death, not really of anyone else's. You are scared of other people's death only because you're because it will affect you – not really so much for them.

You start to see everything is about me – my death, my failure, my this, my that. And that does all stem from the fear of the death of your own body. Once you realise that, you see there's no reason to fear anymore.

Question: Thank you. That changes things because I thought if we sometimes face death it forces us to reprioritise – some things fall by the wayside and that I understand. But what you are saying goes even deeper and helps me because I thought, I fear death and then I change the way I look at life, but life can suck you back in.

Linda: Yes, it's much deeper than that.

And the other thing that you said about trying and making that effort – that's really good too – but be careful that you don't decide not to make any effort ever again because really for this to become completely effortless a lot of effort needs to be made. So there will be those times when you make a lot of effort and then you pull back and something clicks in you – it's usually your intelligence and you just stop and you pull back and everything is okay for a while. But you probably will come back and you'll need to make an effort again to have those periods of effortless.

Eventually it's all effortless but leading up to that it does, off and one, take a lot of effort. So enjoy those periods where it just feels amazing/fine but don't get too attached to it as well.

Question: I think I understand effort because for me sitting on the floor takes a lot of effort. It was more that I was not stuck on the outcome. I had a few notes from my previous retreats and I saw I was really judgmental about my practice. I wrote, (reading with a deep, serious voice) "Good practice in the morning. Bad in the afternoon. Felt really awful in the evening!" (Laughter.) I looked back and wondered, what was that about? This time I'm seeing it's not a competition: chair versus floor. I feel more grounded on the floor so let's try more floor; not because I'm winning. (Laughing) So I see it as a work in progress but yes I understand effort

Linda: A lot of it is effort and hard work. And that's usually not in the advertising for meditation; it's all about feeling calm and still. It gives people the wrong idea. So they come to something like this and they go, "Oh my god, I'm not feeling that so I'm not doing it properly," whereas it's not about that.

Question: I liked what R. said yesterday that you think, "Oh, I've been sitting at home for a while." It made me realise I've been meditating on and off for 15 years but it doesn't mean I'm still a beginner in a sense because I learn every time I sit and every time I come to a retreat. You're probably saying the same thing but you only hear what you need to at the time you need to hear, or you get it when you need to get it.

Linda: It's true. You get it when you need to get it. You hear different things. I'm really saying the same thing over and over again. People probably get really sick for me saying the same thing but every now and again it just suddenly goes in. I know it was like that with my teachers too. There were times when it was just the right time when I was open enough and something they said just got me and I went, "Oh, that's what they mean."

It's always a work in progress. For me it's a work in progress too. It just keeps deepening. That's the beauty about it; that there's not this point where you stop and you go, "It's all perfect." How boring would that be when there's nothing more to do. The beautiful thing about it is that it's always a work in progress and it just becomes deeper and deeper.

There is this point where the suffering ends. And then you sit, like this morning's sit; I've never had a sit like that before – so amazing. Just nothing, still, so still, so quiet, so beautiful. It was incredible! And that just keeps happening. So it's always a work in progress. And that's what this is all about. There's no end. There's no point where you stop. There's no point of perfection.

Question: The last two mornings I sat through which I didn't much last retreat. I wondered would there be any benefit for me to do long sits at home?

Linda: Sometimes, yes. If you feel to, sometimes. Just don't get too attached to it again. I'd say move it around.

I've been suggesting to a few people lately to do a slightly shorter sit in the morning and then a few short sits during the day, even 15 minutes, a few times a day.

Question: Just recently I started to do the short ones.

Linda: So you're talking about a couple of hours; two or three hours?

Question: I think I'd like to try for three. I sit regularly for an hour and a half in the morning. That's just become standard now.

Linda: Don't let anything become standard – change it around. Don't be too rigid with your routine. I know you're a very ordered person so I'd suggest you be a bit more chaotic and change things around. The same if someone's really chaotic; be a bit more ordered for a while and see what happens with that.

So do things that are against what you see as your nature because some of it's probably learned, controlling behaviour and based on fear. It might be to a degree or maybe not but there's only one way to test it. So do things that are going to stir you up, maybe disturb you. Don't feel you need to be calm all the time. If you feel like sitting for a bit longer, do that.

Question: About the habit of describing... I feel like I've got this habit and I've watched it. It's a safety thing of describing things moment by moment. It's a habit I've had all my life. It's kind of tied into, and I can see and I've tasted the fear that comes with it. Is it just a question of just sitting and watching and the habit will wear itself out?

Linda: Yes, everyone does it. That's what thinking is. It's describing things, "Ah, yes I'll do this now. I'll look at them, blah, blah," all this stuff going on.

Question: Because I'm going back and forward, and it feels like an incredible speed, to ground myself all the time and watch that movement. So there's been a lot of that happening. I feel I'm getting to more subtle forms of resistance with moments of calm or peace and relief in between. But it feels like subtle forms of resistance and then another one comes from behind. All I've been doing is watching various levels of my resistance.

Linda: Well do that. Keep doing that.

And with that commenting, keep breaking it up and don't get sucked into it where you start to go, "Oh that's a valid comment. I'll ask a question. That's something I need to know about," whereas you don't. You don't need to know what's happening. That comment is just a subtle form of thinking.

Question: Yes, I watch myself, that needing-to-know, safety thing and fear. It comes in the same package.

Linda: Yes, "I need to know that's the floor. I need to know that's a fire. I need to know this person; what's their name. Oh, I don't remember their name." You spend five minutes trying to remember what it is. You don't need to know anything. So make it a blanket thing, "What do I need to know?" Particularly sitting here, you don't really need to know.

Question: Somehow I like those words. If you could remind me every day or something. 😊

Linda: Yes, so just break it up.

Question: It kind of feels a bit relentless.

Linda: It feels relentless and that's the job of the mind; to make you think that you're never going to be free of it, "This is relentless. It's never going to end. I'm the boss. I will control you forever." It's not the case.

Question: And I don't want to get into that struggling thing. I guess there's a fear that I'm going to get into that struggling thing.

Linda: What struggling thing?

Question: I guess there's a subtle thing where I'm wondering if I'm struggling with the mind or not.

Linda: Well, you have to make an effort. You really do have to make an effort but don't fight it. It will feel like a struggle but yes, don't fight it because that will just give it more power. But you do have to make the effort and the effort is detaching from something like that and coming back to something very basic which is your body. Keep it as simple as possible.

So don't try and stop it. You do need to allow it to be there, to allow the thoughts to arise. If you try and push them down you know they're still going to be there and they're going to be boiling underneath ready to get you when you're unawares. So allow them to come up. You need to have the strength to be able to see them and acknowledge them but then come back to your body.

Question: I also realise how long this journey feels like. I think someone was talking about the immensity of it.

Linda: It is! The whole thing is immense!

Question: I've heard some Buddhist teachers talk about when you're meditating and you're trying to be mindful and notice what's happening that it can be actually useful to comment on that and note it. So you're sitting there and thinking happens so you call it thinking, or pain, or fear if fear comes up; you just note it and name it. But that sounds a little bit like describing as well. It feels like there's a danger of getting the mind involved if you start doing that. It's supposed to be a good technique. I was wondering what you thought about it?

Linda: Yes, it never appealed to me. I've done some Buddhist retreats where they said to do that. I tried it but I don't know; it didn't really appeal to me. There's probably some value in it but in my experience I haven't used it. I tried it for just one retreat once. It just didn't appeal to me but I'm not saying there's no validity in it; maybe there is. I know my teacher's wife used to do it and said she did it; labelling all that stuff. I just didn't get into it.

I prefer the Zen approach which is more simple and even more body based; slightly different to the Vipassana thing. But if you want to try it, try it.

Question: Yes, I have tried it a bit. It doesn't really resonate.

Linda: (Laughs) No, it didn't with me either. It must resonate with some people if they do it.

Question: I want to ask about the word *ease*. I've had some pretty intense times here. But going into meditations I've thought, "Just go easy." With that attitude everything goes much better, although I don't know what better might be. It feels more settled, peaceful. So if thoughts come up, I just put them down, and soften. I keep doing that. And the pain didn't come. I'm not sure if it's my usual chickening out.

Linda: Can you describe a bit more what happened? What do you mean by *ease*?

Question: For some of the meditation I think, "Okay, I've got to make effort. I've got to stay with the breath. I've got to count," wrestling the thoughts, trying to wrestle them down; a crazy sideshow going on. So I decided I just need to find a way to take a little more care: like sit in a chair - *ease*, or find a better position on the floor that's more right or *easeful* for me. I don't know why I keep saying this word *ease*. And take an attitude into the meditation of just letting go; when it feels too intense, just let go. It doesn't feel like it becomes less of an experience. It just feels better.

Linda: I think it's a bit similar to what E. said. There are times when it is good to just let go for a while; don't make that effort. But also, don't get attached to that because then you will start to repress what comes out and see the aim of this to feel comfortable.

So yes, I'd be careful – there's a fine line. There are times when it is good to ease off a bit, particularly if you feel like you're pushing too much and it's just getting a bit too much for you. But there are definitely times when you do need to make quite a bit of effort.

And, it's not about pushing down the thoughts. It's seeing that train of thoughts – that movement – and coming back to your body. It feels like a struggle. It can feel incredibly, incredibly intense.

I'd be careful about the pain too. It can get a bit much where you do need a bit of a break from it, a bit of a breather but then you do need to be prepared to put up with it again, if that's what happens. It might happen and it might not. So you don't get attached to it either. That there has to be pain for it to be worthwhile, is not the case.

So maybe go back and forth. If it feels a bit much, sit on the chair. It is more intense sitting on the floor. But the reason it's good to sit on the floor is that it does ground you more. And having you're back unsupported does free up the energy. It makes you feel more independent. It earths you and it frees up the energy.

But alternate, particularly if you're not used to sitting on the floor for long periods. I'd really suggest people alternate: sit on the floor sometimes, and on a chair.

So sometimes just let go. But really, you never know what's going to happen. And be careful you don't use that to repress what does need to come up.

Question: It felt like thoughts were coming but I was not chopping them off but just putting them down.

Linda: What do you mean, *putting them down*?

Question: Not reacting to them, in a sense. Not going, "Oh, god!" like when you tighten up and your head says something. I'd just ease off.

Linda: Yes, I'd say do that for periods. And again, that is the result of making a lot of effort for a while; then you are able to do that for a period. But then it is going to come back again and that's not going to work forever. It will for a while. And it is a good thing to try and soften your body when you feel it tensing up like that. So I'd say, go back and forth a bit with it.

It's not always going to be really hard and feel like a struggle. And it's not always going to feel – not easy, you're not saying that I know – but a bit softer.

Question: Is nature pure?

Linda: Yes. I doubt the birds are worrying about anything much.

Question: I feel quite overwhelmed when I look at nature and how innocent it is.

Linda: Yes, it is.

So listen to the sounds when you're sitting because they're not polluted by the mind. But then again, watch your reaction to noises out there and noises in the kitchen. Don't divide them and say, "Good, bad, I want this, I don't want this."

Question: When you say, come back to your body after the mind's done its thing and I've floated off – when you come back, do you mean just come back to the belly/breath or do you come back to a sense of presence, or awareness?

Linda: I'd say, come back primarily down here in the belly. But if you've got strong sensations anywhere in your body use that to come back to as well.

Use your breath as an anchor – you keep coming back to that. And say you've got really sore shoulders – if there's a lot of tension there – feel that but keep coming back here. It's a bit like this metronome that's going, boom, boom and it's always going. So you keep coming back. It's really the primary sensation in the body so it's a really good one to use.

I'd say, don't concentrate too much on your head unless you're getting a lot of sensation up there and then feel that but also keep coming back down here to anchor yourself as well.

Question: Well certainly I get enough pain everywhere and could come back to lots of places but I do often find myself up here just... being. It seems up here rather than...

Linda: What are you feeling up here?

Question: Well, there's no feeling. It's just an awareness.

Linda: I'd say, don't spend too much time up there because you will start to tend – I can't say for sure – to become a little bit spacey and then ignore the rest of your body and start and just feel a bit spacey. So I'd say, come down here into the guts of your body. There'll be a tendency at times to want to be anywhere but down here in your body because it can be very uncomfortable, but persevere. Keep coming back.

Have you been counting the breaths at all? (No.) I'd say, try that too. And when you count, count from down here (belly), not from your head – one, two, three. Really count with your breath, with your abdomen from down there. Do everything you can from down there.

It's very habitual to stay up in our heads, to just feel like everything is happening up here – for most people it is. Most people have got very little awareness of, probably, below their neck. This is coming down into the guts of the body. This is where you feel fear, where you feel all the unpleasant emotions and sensation.

How are you today D.?

Question: In the kitchen this morning I suddenly felt totally terrified of coming and sitting here in front of you today. And, I banged myself on the box and bled like a stuffed pig for a minute. It's just because the skin came off. Then I got here, but I really can't tell how I am. I had lots of thoughts – here's my confession – about whether I could sit in F.'s seat since F. won't be here. (Laughter) So I've spent quite a bit of those three hours thinking, "Could I do that? Would it be alright? Who would I ask?" But I think today I could understand what you say about coming back from the thoughts. There were five or six times in that three hours where I saw a thought and I didn't take off with it. I never really understood or felt capable of seeing and doing it.

Linda: Well, that's a huge thing. That's really good.